

VZCZCXRO9517
RR RUEHMA RUEHPA RUEHTRO
DE RUEHNK #0081 0400727
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 090727Z FEB 10
FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9084
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMGH/MAGHREB COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS NOUAKCHOTT 000081

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [KSCA](#) [SENV](#) [UNEP](#) [CITES](#) [AORL](#) [MR](#)
SUBJECT: MAURITANIA'S RESPONSE TO USG CITES COP15 PROPOSALS

REF: STATE 6668

¶1. (U) Embassy Nouakchott's ECON/EST Officer met with the Director and Deputy Director of the Mauritanian Office of Nature Conservation to discuss the USG proposals for the upcoming CITES summit to be held in Doha, Qatar. The Government of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania (GIRM) intends to send a representative to the CITES summit, but has not finalized its representation. The GIRM will likely be represented by Cheikh ould Sidi Mohamed, the Deputy Director of the Office of Nature Conservation who will possibly be joined by Dr. Idrissa Diarra, the Minister Delegate in Charge of Environmental Affairs and Sustainable Development.

¶2. (U) The Director of the Office of Nature Conservation explained that the objective of his office is to protect flora and fauna in Mauritania and that his office frequently works closely with Arab and African partners to gain support for their most important issues. At the moment, his office is most concerned with supporting his African partners to defend CoP15 Proposition 6 (sponsored by the Government of Mali) to maintain a moratorium on the hunting of elephants and trade in ivory products. While Mauritania does not itself have domestic elephant species, or a market for ivory products, he cited the importance of supporting fellow African countries as the reason for his office's staunch support of this initiative.

¶3. (SBU) The Deputy Director mentioned that he communicates regularly with his international CITES colleagues, including those in the USA. He was grateful for the opportunity to discuss USG CITES proposals but indicated that he could not provide any definitive feedback at this point. In theory, the deputy director supports the USG proposals, but he mentioned in particular that the USG submission regarding shark fins could be problematic, due to Mauritania's interest in international fishing markets. He repeatedly emphasized that while his office is solely concerned with the protection of wildlife in Mauritania, there is a constant dialogue with other ministries, particularly the Ministry of Fisheries, because the economic impact of environmental legislation is always considered before making a decision. This is particularly relevant in the domain of fishing, one of Mauritania's largest export markets.

¶4. (U) The Director of the Office was pleased to have the opportunity to discuss the USG CITES submissions and repeated his insistence that Mauritania's primary objective in the upcoming CITES summit will be to support its fellow African and Arab countries in their proposals, particularly those concerning the protection of domestic African elephants. He welcomed any USG support regarding elephant protection initiatives to be discussed at CITES.

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